


GEORGE  
BERNARD  
SHAW



*Eight  
Interviews*



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*by Hayden Church*



Selected by

Edward Connery Lathem

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## *An Introductory Note*



Characterized by *The Saturday Review of Literature* in 1946 as being George Bernard Shaw's "favorite interviewer," Hayden Church was a native of Ogdensburg, New York. Of the beginnings of his career it is recorded that he "entered newspaper work in New York City at eighteen, and at twenty-one sailed to Europe to write about the Old World for the New."

In England, Church soon established himself as a well-known journalist. His many interviews with Shaw spanned a period of more than a quarter of a century, down to the time of the playwright's death in 1950. Some were published near-concurrently, with degrees of textual variation, in Britain and the United States, and not infrequently segments of ones from the 1920s and '30s were drawn upon during later years for inclusion within other interview-articles carrying Church's by-line, as featured in various newspapers and magazines on both sides of the Atlantic.

Here presented is a selection of Shaw/Church interviews originally published during the years 1924-1945.

—E.C.L.



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*Eight Interviews*



I

*Sunday Express*

LONDON

December 28, 1924

The principal headline carried by the *Sunday Express* in publishing this interview was

“G.B.S. WANTS WOMEN RULERS.”







THERE would not be any kings or emperors, or any trousered presidents, in the world if Mr. George Bernard Shaw had his way. There would be only queens, empresses, and other rulers of the feminine persuasion on thrones, and every head of a republic would be either a Mrs. or a Miss.

For in Mr. Shaw's opinion, recently expressed to the writer, women make eminently better heads of States than men; always have and always will.

"The wisest thing any country whose chief of State has real power could do," declared the author of "Saint Joan," "would be to re-enact the Salic Law, excluding men, instead of women, from all posts of authority, except perhaps minor ones such as men are capable of filling.

"They held a general election in the United States recently," Mr. Shaw went on, "and, unlike the one we conducted simultaneously, it had some desirable results. The principal of these was the election, for the first time in history, of women as governors of two American States—the great States of Texas and Wyoming.

"That is a most hopeful portent, because the governor of every American State and the actual ruler of every country ought to be a woman. It must be evident to any one who has studied history, or appreciates the

difference in the mentality of the sexes, that women make, and always have made, abler, more intelligent, and eminently safer rulers than men."

"Would the United States be better off if its Presidents were women instead of men?" I asked, somewhat startled.

"Undoubtedly, the United States would be wise in having women as Presidents, if the presidency were a life office," was the emphatic reply. "But as it is commonly held for only four years it doesn't make much difference."

To interview Mr. Bernard Shaw is no easy matter at any time; at present it verges on the impossible. The superman is hard at work, he told me, not, unfortunately, on a new play, but on what he described as a "very dull book" (to be entitled "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism"), and he doesn't want to be bothered by anybody or anything. There are, accordingly, but few subjects on which he would be prepared to talk for publication just now, but that of the suitability of women to be heads of States proved, luckily, to be one of these.

"Do you seriously believe," I asked him, "that women make better rulers than men?"

"Much better! A woman can manage men much more effectively than a man can, and gets them to work more intelligently and more loyally. The majority of male rulers and heads of Republics pick the most obviously unfitted persons for offices of state. As a rule women do their choosing much better. And men work under a woman with much less friction; the relations between woman and man are never quite so strained as

between man and man. Administration by subordinate male statesmen worked smoothly under Queen Victoria, and it does to-day under Queen Wilhelmina.

"For sheer ability Queen Elizabeth was by far the best sovereign England ever had. In point of fact, she made mischief, because she was so autocratic, and had so much sheer ability that she left the throne too strong, with the result that the weak men who came after her—James I. and Charles—and tried to rule as she did, made an unholy mess of things. Queen Elizabeth reigned by the sheer force of her intelligence and personality. Any competent would-be usurper with 500 men behind him would have ousted her at any time. She had nothing to go on with but her own wits. But she was as safe as houses.

"Of course, one disadvantage about having women as sovereigns and presidents," Mr. Shaw went on, "is that you are sure to get them too clever. You would be sure to get more queens like Christina of Sweden. She was much too clever, and lived like a man. She was a good deal like Joan of Arc.

"The fact is that women are never quite as big fools as men. Whatever their defects may be, they are never handicapped by man's impracticability and sentimentality. Women have to have common sense. They must have it because it is they who are responsible for the bread and butter arrangements. They get practice in managing things by having to keep their homes in order. Men leave it all to them, and go away and amuse themselves. They have turned a job into a sport. It has passed into a proverb—'playing the game.'"

"Do you consider that there would be less political corruption if women were at the head of things than there is under men?" I asked.

"I don't know about that, but I am certain that any corrupt woman would get better value for her money than corrupt men succeed in doing. In America, where there is a great deal of corruption, certain men acquire a reputation that is entirely undeserved for their ability in suborning other men. More often than not these men are the greatest fools in the way they practise corruption. They are always bribing the wrong people. A woman would get her bribes to the right people; she would see that her bribes got to the right address."

"You consider, don't you," I asked, "that women are a lot more primitive than men? That when they want a thing they are troubled less by scruples than men? You have emphasised this when drawing some of the women in your plays, haven't you?"

"Yes, there is a beautiful directness about all women. They succeed in getting what they want by going straight for their objective. In one of my plays a woman says: 'The only way to get what you want is to go right for it and grab it.' Men, on the other hand, invariably explore the most roundabout methods. American men particularly." (Mr. Shaw invariably has a rod in pickle for our masculine "cousins.") "If an American man wants anything, he first goes to a policeman and asks if he can direct him to an agent. Then he asks the agent to get another agent, or he tries to find somebody in Russia to get the thing for him. But women go straight to the mark. I have noticed it in such dealings as I have

had with women dramatic agents. They come straight to me. A man who wants to get anything out of me generally goes to the person most obviously unconnected with me — usually to the Archbishop of Canterbury — and asks him if he knows anybody who can get round Shaw.

“If a man hears that somebody in Aberdeen took the chair for me at a lecture ten years ago, he is practically certain to buy a first-class ticket for Aberdeen, with the idea of getting this man as an intermediary between him and myself, overlooking the fact that I am at the other end of the telephone.

“Men make a hopeless mess of politics because, once they get talking among themselves about anything, they go on talking, and do nothing. Men imagine that if they only talk long enough about anything they are sure to accomplish something, and more often than not they talk so long about nothing that they end by convincing themselves that nothing is something. That is the sort of thing that women don’t do.

“Women,” declared Mr. Shaw in conclusion, “have all the vices of men, but their follies are never quite so foolish as masculine follies.”





## II

### *The World*

NEW YORK

December 5, 1926

#### “SHAW MAY COME HERE — IN MOVIES”

the newspaper announced in presenting this interview, which treated of that subject, as well as several others, including comment on Shaw's works relating to boxing — comment occasioned by heavyweight champion Gene Tunney's having lately spoken critically of *Cashel Byron's Profession* and by the prospect of boxer-turned-actor/vaudevillian J. J. Corbett's being featured at London in a “dramatic version” of that novel.





IF George Bernard Shaw ever makes an appearance in America it will be in celluloid, he says, because "the mere mobbing that I should receive wherever I went would kill me in no time."

He is seriously considering making a celluloid appearance, however. The American "phono-film" is to be demonstrated for him within the next few days and he believes it more than likely that he will accept an offer from America for exclusive rights to a movie which will present the Shaw features and the Shaw gestures for a specially written lecture. The lecture will be delivered by the "phono" part of the device.

It has been pointed out to Shaw frequently that his biggest public is in the United States and Canada and that his admirers there should be given an opportunity to see him.

"I know that Americans who think well of my works are anxious to see me," Shaw replied, "because they are always writing to tell me so (so are the ones in other parts of the world, for that matter), but it is really impossible at my age to consider going. The mere mobbing that I should receive wherever I went would kill me in no time. I should like to go well enough, but I couldn't afford to take the time unless I accepted one of the offers that are constantly being made to me for lecture tours, and I'm much too old to consider lecturing

throughout America. It is tragic to think of myself tottering from one one-night stand to another.

“Especially now when I’m nearly prostrated with all the lionizing I’ve had to undergo recently. It’s been gratifying to me, naturally, but I simply couldn’t endure any more of it. Last spring, as you know, I had a serious illness. I had just begun to recover from it when my seventieth birthday came along and brought with it a perfect orgy of congratulatory functions and a flood of felicitations from all over the world that had to be acknowledged. I had to take a holiday in Italy to recuperate from the effects of that and was hoping to be left in peace for a while, but it was not to be. In Sweden they took it into their heads to award me the Nobel Prize, and that has resulted in more lionizing and fuss.

“It would be sheer madness for me to think of visiting America, and now the perfection of the phono-film makes it entirely unnecessary that I should do so. I had no idea what results had been achieved with it until recently when I was present at a demonstration of an Italian one that was given in Milan. While they were still attempting to synchronize sounds with actions, the effect was simply grotesque. I should never have had anything to do with such films. But now that the sound and the picture are both on the same film the effect is absolutely lifelike.

“I understand that the American phono-film is even better than the Italian one. I haven’t seen it yet but am going to in a week or so, and if it satisfies me I shall probably accept an offer that came to me from the United States recently to make one of myself.

"So I need not go to America to lecture, but can say what I want to say to Americans, sitting quietly in my study, and pocket \$50,000 without any physical discomfort. Those who want to see and hear me will be able to do so exactly as well as if I were before them in the flesh—with the added advantage to me that I sha'n't have to shake hands with my audiences."

Shaw beamed as he threw in this characteristically malicious touch. In spite of the account he gave of his dire physical condition, he talked with all his customary sparkle and energy and his now whitening whiskers bristled as aggressively as ever. He is looking a shade paler than usual, perhaps, but there was no other visible evidence that he is any the worse for being, as he asserts, lionized almost to death.

Almost since he finished "Saint Joan" two years ago, Shaw has concentrated on writing the big and immensely serious book which he calls "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism." That he expected to finish it long before this is evident from the fact that in "Who's Who" for 1926 it is listed among his works. Knowing that Shaw considers it one of the most important of these, I was anxious to discover when it may be expected.

"I only wish I could tell you," he said. "The writing of that book has been one long series of maddening interruptions. Time and time again I've imagined that I was clear—that I should be able to get on with it undisturbed, and every time one foolish thing or another has happened to switch me off it. I shall finish it some day, I suppose, but even if I should die to-morrow there

would be quite a big chunk of it available. I suppose I must have written at least 130,000 words, so those who are waiting for it are certain of something, whatever happens to me."

Shaw is writing this book, as he has written all his recent plays, including "Saint Joan," in shorthand. He uses Pitman's system, it appears, and makes his outlines so carefully (putting in all the vowel signs) that his secretary, when transcribing them, rarely has to ask him what one stands for.

Apropos of the recent Tunney incident, Shaw explained how he came to write "The Admirable Bashville," which is a dramatization, in Elizabethan blank verse, of "Cashel Byron's Profession."

"It came about," said Shaw, "through my hearing that James J. Corbett, who had been appearing in New York in a dramatic version of my novel, made without my knowledge or consent, was planning to appear in it in London. In order to prevent this, I hastily wrote 'The Admirable Bashville' and had it produced for copyright purposes."

As the preface to "The Admirable Bashville" discloses, Shaw wrote it in blank verse because he "had but a week to write it in," and because "blank verse is so childishly easy and expeditious (hence, by the way, Shakespeare's copious output) that by adopting it I was enabled to do within the week what would have cost me a month in prose."

Shaw also alluded briefly to the lawsuit in which he is involved with another American film producer, Jesse Arnold Levinson, over the movie rights in the musical



play, "The Chocolate Soldier," which is based on Shaw's "Arms and the Man." It is evident that the action Levinson has brought against him is causing Shaw a good deal of annoyance, presumably because it represents one more unforeseen interference with the progress of "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism."

"I should be sure of winning the case if only lawyers know anything about law," he said. "But if he wins, he will only succeed in getting me restrained from doing something that I don't want to do, because I've done it already—namely, warn film producers everywhere to keep their hands off my plays."

Finding Shaw in an unusually communicative mood, I made an attempt to get him to say how much he has made out of his writings. The excuse for doing so was his statement, in refusing the Nobel prize, that his readers and audiences provide him with more than sufficient money for his needs. I reminded him of this and remarked that it would be interesting to know, in these days when fortunes are made out of trash, exactly what works of acknowledged genius have produced.

Shaw looked for a second or so as if he might be going to "'fess up." But then he proceeded to side-step.

"Of course the way to make a great deal of money is to turn out showy trash that will last about twenty-four hours," he said. "As regards my own works, it would be very hard to say how much they have produced. Some of my books and plays, of course, for a long time brought in very little. But your question reminds me that I shall have to do something about my American

income. I must find some way of reducing it. I supposed until recently that it was only big enough to make me liable to an income tax of 5 or 6 per cent., but it seems I'm now in the super-tax class. I really shall have to do something about it. They are taking far too much away from me."

He said all this with the famous Shavian smile that tells you that he is only fooling. Super-tax or no super-tax, however, the performance of Shaw's plays the world over must be making him very rich. As a matter of fact I heard recently that the rate at which checks flow in on him has compelled him to provide his secretary with an adding machine!

Making a final effort, I asked him if he would say what his income from his plays alone is. But Shaw, as English interviewers put it, "was not to be drawn."

"Really it's very difficult to calculate," he replied. "All I can say is that my writings have produced as much as any one person is entitled to."

III

*Liberty*

CHICAGO

January 5, 1929

The magazine introduced this text by saying that in it

“MR. SHAW SPEAKS OF HATES  
ACROSS THE SEA”

as well as of “Love, Prohibition, God, Spiritualism, a  
King for America, and Birth Control.”





Is war between the United States and Great Britain conceivable?

It certainly is conceivable, in the opinion of George Bernard Shaw, who asserts that the two peoples, supposedly the best of friends, actually hate each other.

"If only we would confess our hatred," declared Shaw to me, "and ask ourselves what it is all about, we should have a chance of purging our souls of it. But this pretense of being affectionate cousins is pure poison and leads to jealous extensions of our respective navies."

The Grand Old Man of literature is obviously in fine fettle after his recent holiday on the French Riviera. For all of his seventy-two years, he came into the room where I was awaiting him with the elastic step of a "fit" man of half that age, and, as the stock phrase has it, "radiated energy" throughout our long conversation. He has now, of course, deserted venerable Adelphi Terrace, his habitat for so many years, and lives at Whitehall Court (a big block of modern service flats nigh to historic Whitehall itself), where, by the way, H. G. Wells also lodges when in town.

Here Mr. and Mrs. Shaw occupy an exceedingly pleasant suite, and enjoy, among other things, a fine view of the Thames as it flows past the Houses of Parliament. At night they are treated to a perfect orgy of

sky signs, one of the biggest of which, by the way, advertises an American tooth paste.

The interview with G. B. S. that follows is, in one way at least, indubitably unique. To some of my questions Mr. Shaw preferred to give written answers [ . . . ] .

But enough of preliminary! Now for the interview itself.

As a beginning I asked Mr. Shaw what plans he had for future work. "Are you now writing a new play or book?" I inquired.

"I have no book or play on hand just now," he replied. "I am engaged upon a collected edition of my works which has been waiting on my leisure now for some years — unluckily for it, as I never have any leisure. There is a mass of my writings scattered about the press which has never been collected and made accessible, most of it forgotten and unrecorded except by amateur bibliographers, without whom I should never be able to recover it.

"Do not ask me what my plans are. I am not a man of plans. I always have too many arrears to make up, to have any need of plans."

"Will you say anything about the reception given to your newest work, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*?" I asked.

"The reception of the *Guide* has been overwhelming," Shaw replied. "I meant it to be."

In this tremendous work, a recent best seller on both sides of the Atlantic, Shaw declares that most of the evils of modern civilization would disappear if national incomes were divided equally—in other words, if



everybody, chimney sweep and college president, rat catcher and ruler alike, had exactly the same amount to live on.

I asked him if he had been able to calculate what everybody's share in the national incomes of the United States and of Great Britain would be, were there an equal distribution. Also if he himself would be content with the universal income, which, presumably, would be beggarly compared with that which he now enjoys.

"Such a calculation is impossible," he replied. "You can take the income tax returns and the commercial statistics and arrive at a figure which you know has no static value because there are enormous omissions of unrecorded activities, countings twice over of recorded ones, and no discrimination between parasitic activities and really productive ones. But an equally fallacious figure for next year will show how we are moving.

"Unfortunately it will not save us from disaster because a dangerous increase in parasitism—for instance, in unearned income from foreign investments and in the taking of the luxury trades, accompanied by a rise in wages making motor cars as common as umbrellas—would be registered as a great increase in prosperity, although it would be as delusive as the prosperity of the Russian grand dukes before 1917.

"One of the dangers of these bogus calculations of income is that they are used by thoughtless people to show that if property were divided equally, everybody would get fifteen shillings. Having comfortable incomes themselves, they do not realize what a temptation fifteen shillings is to a laborer. There is not a mob

in Europe that would not burn the whole place out if it thought it could get fifteen shillings a head for the job.

"By including such figures as capital values and land values, as any business man would do, I could bring out a much bigger figure than fifteen shillings. These calculations are utter nonsense except for purposes of comparison when the same data are used. All you have to depend on is the flat fact that every worker can produce enough for himself and several others as well. Stick to that and it will not let you down.

"As to what I would be content with, who cares what I would or would not be content with? I might not be content with a thousand millions. Yet people with much less than that are giving it away in fistfuls and establishing trusts and foundations to spend it for them on public objects.

"The question is not what we would be content with, but what there is for us to get. We shall have to be content with our share, whether we like it or not. It is our public business to see that everybody shall have as much as possible, and not less or more than anyone else. It is up to anyone who wants more to explain why we should give it to him."

Switching to a more immediate problem, I asked Mr. Shaw to discuss the effect of Prohibition on sex morality. In doing so I reminded him that in the United States under Prohibition, girls who formerly never knew the taste of liquor carry pocket flasks and behave recklessly, and that women go to men's rooms to drink, with the inevitable result.

"Oh, come!" exclaimed the Superman. "Don't make

Prohibition an excuse for drawing me on sex morality. By all means let that sort of girl go to the rooms of that sort of man and get as drunk as they both please, with or without 'the inevitable result.' You don't want to cover the United States with saloons on their account, do you? Let them drink themselves dead. They know how to sterilize the inevitable results at all events, in spite of the successors of Comstock."

How great (or how small) a part has love for women played in the life of George Bernard Shaw? There is an unexplained side to his character which might, one thought, be made clear if he could be induced to say something about his early love affairs. As to these (if any) his biographers are silent, and although Shaw's voluminous "prefaces" abound in autobiographical details, his experiences with the "tender passion" are not among them.

In his plays he has, of course, invariably depicted woman as the pursuer, and before, at the somewhat late age of forty-two, he surprised everybody by marrying, he was generally regarded as a misogynist.

Some people persist in regarding him as something like that, even now! Among these is one of the cleverest women of my acquaintance, and she, on hearing that I was to interview Mr. Shaw, remarked, "The question I should most like to ask G. B. S. is 'Have you ever been in love?' But I think," she added, "that I could answer it myself with one word—Never!"

I asked Shaw to say if she was right or wrong. His reply (in this case written) was as follows:

"Your circle of female acquaintances must be an ex-

traordinarily stupid one if the cleverest of them cannot guess. What does the question mean? A love affair may mean anything, from a correspondence continued for years between people who have hardly ever met, to one of those inevitable results of a drunken orgy which you described as characteristic of American girls under the spell of Prohibition.

"The truth is, all the cases worth counting are different. I could tell you that I have never been in love. I could tell you that I have never been out of it. And you would be no wiser than you were before. Therefore I shall not tell you anything at all. Next question, please."

"Cannot you suggest," I asked, "the needed name for 'talking films' and indicate what their future may be, and under what conditions you would permit your plays to be represented by this process? What would be the effect of such a production on the regular dramatic rights, and on the future of the theater?"

"I speak of 'movies' and 'talkies,'" Shaw replied. "I cannot foresee what names will catch on. I do not see how dramatic rights need come into the discussion, as the existing ones cover all the developments that are yet within sight. It is the theaters that are likely to be affected, not so much by talking films, which require theaters for their exhibition as much as *viva voce* representations, as by wireless television.

"You must remember," he went on, "that a theater, besides being troublesome to get to, especially on wet nights, and expensive, is also much less comfortable than the domestic fireside of a reasonably well-to-do family. At present a large theater with low prices, not

exceeding a dollar or so for the best seats, and giving at least three hours and a half of solid entertainment, is sure of an audience of lodgers and people whose homes are crowded and uncomfortable. Raise the prices to the level which only very comfortably housed people can afford and you may go whistle for your audience. I hate going to the theater, and would never darken the doors of one again if the drama could be brought to my home for me. Who that can afford a good wireless set would go to concerts if he could have all the music he needs broadcast?

“It is in this direction that you must look for the most important changes. You have two main developments to study: the reproductive process by which a performance can be repeated as often as anyone can be induced to listen to it, and the broadcasting device by which audiences of millions can enjoy a single performance. Both tend to make artistic performances so stupendously lucrative that it is possible to disregard the great and hitherto prohibitive cost of bringing them to the utmost perfection that money, pains, and purchasable talent can achieve.

“Go home and think about that, and you will have no time to worry yourself about dramatic rights and box office shop.”

It was, curiously enough, a jesting answer given by Mr. Shaw to a further question of mine that led to discussion of the “conceivability” of a conflict between the United States and Great Britain.

Just recently an exciting report from across the Atlantic announced that Shaw had been nominated for

the throne of America by a "royalist league" in the United States. Its members were stated to have "hired a hall" for discussion of a resolution that "A monarchy was better than our so-called democracy." These "royalists" and their resolution later proved to be myths. The incident reminded me, however, that something Shaw once said to me had led me to believe that he considered the United States would be better off as a monarchy, and I asked him now if I had been correct in thus inferring.

"That would depend," he replied, "on how far the monarchical form was carried. If every state in the union had a king and a court and a dynasty, then God help you! I should not recommend even one federal king at the White House.

"But if you were to return to the British Empire as dominions on the footing of Canada and Australasia, you would be surprised at the convenience of being a crowned republic instead of a tyrannically Presidented one.

"If you go to war with us and beat us, that will be quite an eligible form of annexation. But I am afraid nothing short of such a defeat would induce England to take back the prodigal. You see, England used to like colonies, because England was the dog and the colonies were the tail. At present the tail is beginning to wag the dog so vigorously that England will presently have to bite it off if she is to continue to call her soul her own.

"If the United States came in, the combination would be magnificent, unprecedented, irresistible, everything that appeals to American megalomania. But



where would this poor little island be? Only a more crowded and uncomfortable Ireland! So I am afraid you will have to go on as you are for the present, and be content with an occasional visit from the Prince of Wales."

"You were joking, of course," I said, "when you spoke just now of our going to war with you. Seriously, do you consider a war between the United States and Great Britain conceivable?"

"Of course it's conceivable," he replied. "It's the hardest thing in the world to prevent men of English stock from fighting one another!"

"I very well remember," he went on, "attending a big meeting that was held at the Mansion House to celebrate the Hundred Years of Peace between Great Britain and the United States. The then Mr. Asquith, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the American Ambassador all made eloquent speeches saying how wonderful it was that for an entire century there had been a complete absence of hostility between these kindred peoples.

"The truth was, however, that there had been scarcely ten minutes during the entire period when the two peoples were not, more or less, at each other's throats."

And then he made the striking commentary already quoted.

"If only we would confess our hatred and ask ourselves what it is all about, we should have a chance of purging our souls of it. But this pretense of being affectionate cousins is pure poison, and leads to jealous extensions of our respective navies.

"If you have any doubt of this," Shaw added, "read the papers on the Anglo-French proposals and the American reception of them when Mr. Hearst spotted the cat in the bag and let it out."

Answering a clergyman, the other day, who asked him, "Has religion lost its thrill for the young?" Shaw replied, "Common, shop religion has no thrill for anybody, young or old; the real thing has a thrill for everybody, old or young."

But what is, for Shaw, "the real thing" in religion? Does he believe in God, or is he, as is generally inferred, an atheist?

Yes, Shaw does believe in God, but he conceives the Almighty (as the Church of England in 1562 solemnly proclaimed that it did) as "without body, parts, or passion." Not as a Being at all, in fact, but as an *élan vital*, or Life Force.

I asked him if this Life Force, according to his belief, is sentient, or if it works automatically. And if, in the latter case, prayer is a waste of time.

"The Life Force becomes sentient," he replied, "by creating organs of sense; your eyes and ears and nose and fingers, for instance. All living things are its organs.

"No," he continued, "prayer is not a waste of time except when it is mere begging. Even then it may be a comfort. If you pray that the horse you have backed may win you will not increase his chances of winning, and to that extent you are wasting your time; but if it makes you more hopeful until the race is over, it may be worth your while.

"The praying by which a saint 'makes his soul' was



said by Mahomet to be a greater delight than perfume or women. Nobody who understands the prophet will ever say that this kind of praying is a waste of time."

At this point I reminded him of a poser that, when a young man, he put to a priest who attempted to convert him to Roman Catholicism. It amounted to this, that, granting the universe was made by somebody, somebody must have made him. And I asked if, in the meantime, he had formed a theory as to the beginning of everything, including the Life Force.

Shaw gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Whoever," he said, "does not know enough about the limitations of his own mind not to waste time asking unanswerable conundrums is a fool. This particular conundrum belongs to a childish stage of speculation. How do we know that creation was a business of making?"

"The Jews who denied that Christ was God did so on the ground that he was a carpenter. We are not bound to regard creation as the work of a carpenter, who must have been made by another carpenter. It only leads to an infinity of carpenters; that is, to manifest bosh. Napoleon's 'Who made all that?' was baby talk. The problem is beyond our mental powers."

That Shaw believes in survival after death is clear. Stated more accurately, he believes that we die to be born again and "born better" (to be "re-manufactured," as he puts it in one of his prefaces) and so again and yet again "at each lift toward the goal of evolution, which can only be a being that cannot be improved upon."

But he made it equally clear to me that he does not

believe that our individualities survive eternally, nor does he consider it desirable that they should.

"If you want to live forever," he said, "if you want to carry your memories of your blunders and infirmities and defects and meannesses and mistakes and humiliations and sins and illnesses with you to the last syllable of recorded time, you must be on better terms with yourself than I have ever succeeded in establishing between myself and Bernard Shaw.

"Combine my advice with Dogberry's: die like a gentleman, and thank God you are rid of a knave. Anything that is worth keeping in you will be worked up into some better attempt at a man than you are.

"All the people I know who look forward to an eternity of themselves stipulate that they shall be angels in the next world. As in that case they certainly will not recognize themselves, nor be recognized by any of their friends, they might just as well go the way of all flesh without murmuring, and believe in the life to come without insisting that it should retain their names and addresses.

"Tennyson told them to rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things; and I tell them the same. But no: they want their dead selves to be kept as my grandmother used to keep old wax candle ends. I have no patience with such conceit."

This brought us inevitably to spiritualism, to which faith, by the way, Sir Frank Benson, the well known Shakespearean actor, is the latest notable convert. I had been especially anxious to obtain Mr. Shaw's views on this subject because, so far as I knew, he had never ex-

pressed them. And it appears I was right; he never has—until now!

“My experience of spiritualism,” he said, “began when I was a small boy. My mother amused herself in her old age by making what she called spirit drawings (I have a bundle of them somewhere) and holding conversations with the dead. She was as sane and shrewd as Sir Oliver Lodge, which proves that if a belief in spiritualism is a craze, it is one which a thoroughly soundheaded person can keep in a thought-tight compartment without injury to their general mental health.

“I noticed that my mother soon got bored by the spirits of people she had known, including the relatives for whose sake she had taken up the practice. She communicated almost entirely with a sage whose date was 6000 B. C.

“I have never before said anything about this in public. I held my tongue because I did not like to say anything that could worry my mother; and I have kept it up since her death because Oliver Lodge and Conan Doyle are friends of mine; and there is a fact in my past that makes it impossible for us to be in sympathy on the subject.

“I am quite sure that neither of them has ever cheated at a *séance*. Well, I have. I used to say that unless everybody cheated as hard as they could, and the results obtained went beyond those that could be obtained by cheating, the *séances* could prove nothing. Accordingly I cheated, and was amazed by my success (I am no conjurer) and by the discovery that the more cultivated, clever, and imaginative my victims were, the

more easy it was to cheat them—or rather to induce them to cheat themselves.

“Even when I owned up, they would hardly believe me. I thus lost my innocence, and could not feel about the experiences of Lodge and Doyle as they did themselves.

“You see, there is the terrible difficulty that almost all the believers who are not mere miracle gapers have lost somebody they are fond of; and one cannot shatter a consolation and a hope as one could criticize a scientific experiment. Why should I trouble Benson with my skepticism if his relations with the dead make him happy?”

From spiritualism to “sex” novels was something of a jump, but I made it, nevertheless. It has been declared recently (in connection with the official banning of *The Well of Loneliness*) that the line must be drawn somewhere in regard to the limits to which novelists may go in discussing sex.

I asked Mr. Shaw to say where the line should be drawn. And who should draw it and for whose benefit. Should there be graduated censorships, I queried—i. e., for those up to fourteen, those up to twenty-one, and those up to seventy?

“What is the use of drawing lines,” demanded Shaw, “when the lines are continually moving? Where is the line that was drawn at Shelley’s *Cenci*, at Tolstoy’s *Power of Darkness*, at Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, at Mrs. Warren’s *Profession*, and at the *Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*? As to age limits, how would they be fixed?

“You may put any book into the hands of a child; it

will find nothing in it except what its innocence brings to it.

"After twelve, it is desirable that children should have access to poems, pictures, statues, plays, and films to educate their growing sex appetites by associating voluptuousness with beauty, refinement, delicacy, grandeur, and high personal honor.

"At twenty-one, people should have sufficient strength of mind to tell busybodies to mind their own business. If adults are to be interfered with, it should be by law, not by censorships. When you ask me whether there should be graduated censorships, I feel just as if you had asked me whether there should be graduated inquisitions. What do you want a censorship at all for? Are you incapable of managing your own affairs in the matter of choosing books to read?"

There having been a renewal of controversy over birth control recently, I asked Mr. Shaw for his views thereupon. These, which he wrote later, are as follows:

"The question is a manifold one. The objections to birth control differ very widely. There is the simple taboo: the classification of the subject as unmentionable. With that there is no arguing. You just keep on mentioning it until the taboodlers get used to it and the taboo dies a natural death.

"Then there is the objection that if you give people knowledge they will make a bad use of it. Well, of course they will. The result of a knowledge of chemistry has been poison gas. If we were not taught to read, write, and cipher we could not read bad books, write anonymous letters, and forge checks, falsify accounts, and gamble.

“There is no sort of knowledge that cannot and will not be used for evil as well as good, just as there is no sort of poker that will not crack a skull as well as poke a fire.

“That is the price of civilization; and it has to be paid in the matter of birth control, as in other matters. But the knowledge that birth control is possible is now so widespread that neither American, French, nor Irish legislation can suppress it. What our obscurantists can do, very mischievously, is to prevent all disinterested public criticisms of its methods and discussion of its effects. Anyone can go into a shop and buy a contraceptive device guaranteed by the manufacturer to be effective and harmless; but if it turns out to be useless and injurious nobody may expose it.

“Instead of appointing a royal commission to investigate the subject—nothing is more urgently needed—we set the police to prevent even an unofficial investigation like Booth’s investigation of poverty. Dr. Marie Stopes, making a desperate effort to investigate it and advise us as an individual scientist, can obtain no redress for the worst libels that any fool may choose to hurl at her.

“Just consider the situation. We are up against an overpopulation problem created by capitalism, and are trying to get rid of it by substituting emigration. Socialists say quite truly that Socialism can get rid of it, and clergymen tell us that self-control can relieve it.

“But it cannot wait for Socialism, and people will not practice self-control. We are not to be allowed even to discuss the practical remedies.

"Then there is the domestic problem. We are all reading a new batch of biographies of Charles Dickens, whose marriage was wrecked after twenty years by the state to which his wife had been reduced by chronic pregnancy resulting in an enormous family which, if it should have been produced at all, should have been spaced out by decent intervals for recuperation.

"There are such cases in all directions, in addition to those of poor families where the overcrowding relatively to the weekly wage is as bad as among a boatful of castaways at sea.

"The most difficult and delicate psychological and biological questions are involved in the prevention of these conditions; yet poor people who want information can get nothing but clandestinely circulated advertisements. The whole subject needs airing. I am myself quite unable to make up my mind about the methods simply because the necessary discussion of them is virtually suppressed.

"The State expects us all to marry, and yet forbids anyone to study and teach the art of marriage. We have admitted at last that there is a technique of postnatal maternity, and that untaught and unskilled mothers produce a gigantic infant mortality. But if you suggest that there is a technique of matrimony and that countless marriages are wrecked by ignorance of it, you are classed with traders in obscene photographs.

"We suffer from sexphobia and call it decency. It is more dangerous to civilization than all the debauchery which it so signally fails to prevent."







IV

*Liberty*

CHICAGO

September 20, 1930

The magazine's readers were told that in this presentation

“MR. SHAW SPEAKS OUT — ON DIET,  
PROHIBITION, AND AMERICA.”





“EVERYTHING I eat has been proved by some writer or other to be a deadly poison. Everything I don’t eat has been proved indispensable to life.”

This was one of the many flashes of George Bernard Shaw’s wit that scintillated throughout the first interview in which the most famous vegetarian in the world has consented to reveal exactly what he eats.

In Mr. Shaw’s garden at Ayot St. Lawrence, amid the cherry orchards of Hertfordshire, his talk ranged over a wide variety of topics. It included some crackling comments on Prohibition and an avowal of the real reason why he continues to refuse to go to America and lecture, as well as the revelation of what hitherto has been one of his most jealously guarded secrets.

One previous interviewer after another has tried his hardest to probe the mystery of Shaw’s noncarnivorous diet—which may possibly account for his wonderful vitality at seventy-four—and a succession of editors has urged him to name his price for a signed article unveiling the facts. But until now he has declined to unveil them.

“I only mislead people,” he replied, “when I tell them what I eat or don’t eat. My diet and habits might not suit them; and I don’t eat the same things every day, except perhaps at breakfast, at which I eat either oatmeal porridge liberally dosed with butter, or some drier ce-

real, with half a grapefruit, and a cup of Instant Postum to keep up the tradition of a cup of warm brown fluid with milk and sugar in it.

"I eat three meals a day, and am convinced that I should be better with two. In spite of a remark that has been quoted, I eat salads and fruit. I finish my lunch and dinner with an orange almost always; other fruits are occasional luxuries which I may peck at as I do at candies; but if they are not there I do not miss them. I eat cheese, butter, and eggs, but no flesh, no fowl, and no fish.

"I object to carnivorous diet not only because I feel instinctively that it is abominable but because it involves a prodigious slavery of men to animals."

"How do you feel about Prohibition?" I asked. "Is it your view that it has failed in the United States, as the American 'wets' declare? Would the United States be doing the sensible thing by recognizing — as it is said — that it is impossible to enforce a law that runs counter to the wishes of a large section of the community, and quashing the Eighteenth Amendment?"

"America was running dry so rapidly when the amendment was passed," Shaw replied, "that it was perhaps a mistake to force the pace. It may be that life is so miserable in America that people cannot bear it without drugging themselves with alcohol. If we cannot face the life our country offers us without Dutch courage then there is something wrong with the life and with the country.

"You had better try a Nineteenth Amendment abolishing Capitalism and private property. When you have

got that working — no easy job; but Russia is doing it — you will probably find the Eighteenth Amendment working spontaneously.”

“When are you going to America to lecture?” was asked.

“I have seen a good many English celebrities after they had returned from lecturing in America,” Shaw replied, “and they all looked like broken-down cab horses. At my age the one-night stands would finish me.”

“But modern travel in America ought not to be so taxing,” he was urged.

“Oh, I know all about that,” declared G. B. S. “The last man who tried to persuade me to go pointed out that I should be guarded at every point against the exuberance of my admirers, and could travel in such comfort and luxury that I could not fail to have the time of my life. I reminded him that I had already had the time of my life and had now to consider the time of my death. Besides, what man can compete with his own movie-talkie?”

“Another reason for not going to America as a professional lecturer,” he went on, “is that by doing so I should spoil a record that I have made for myself. Although I have made hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of extemporaneous public addresses during the past fifty years, I have never taken money for one of them.

“It was in my early days, when I had begun to attract some attention as a writer, that I began to be asked to lecture by Sunday societies in different parts of the country. The fee generally offered me was the one cus-

tomary in those days, about ten guineas, or fifty dollars, on the condition that politics and religion were barred.

"My reply to such invitations was that I never spoke in public on any other subjects than politics and religion, and that I always dealt with those topics in the most controversial fashion. I added, however, that if I came I should not want any fee, as I should be perfectly content with my third-class fare when the distance involved a journey beyond my means. The invariable reply was that on these terms they would be overjoyed to have me lecture at any time, and that they felt sure they could rely on my discretion in handling delicate subjects. Thus I learned that it is only the unpaid piper who is allowed to call the tune.

"From that time until my retirement from the platform I spoke everywhere, from the street corner, where I really learned the business, to the most select assemblies. Whenever I was announced to speak the hall was crowded and the pay boxes full; but none of the money came to me. It would be a pity to begin selling myself now.

"I am not sure," he added, "that it would not have been wiser, from my standpoint, to have permitted those who enjoy my writings to cherish any illusions they may have had about my personal appearance. The probability is that they had pictured me as a most magnificent creature, and that even the movie came with a shock of disillusion.

"Undoubtedly discretion dictates that any writer who desires to retain such veneration as his readers may feel for him should keep his personal appearance a

deadly secret. In the good old days before photography was invented a literary man's admirers could believe, if it pleased them to, that he looked like Dante. But then foolish publishers began sticking portraits of authors in their books, and let the public discover what deplorable specimens of humanity most of us writers are."

Never easy to see, Mr. Shaw is at present all but inaccessible. He is desperately busy with what will be the first collected edition of his works. It has been in preparation ever since 1921 and would have been ready for publication long before this if it hadn't been for all the other demands on the distinguished author's time. At his home in the country he is putting in long hours on the work of revision. [ . . . ]

"When shall we have the Collected Edition?" was asked. "How many volumes will it make? You have been working on it for several years, haven't you?"

"No," he answered, "I have *not* been working on it for the nine years that have elapsed since the type was chosen. That is why I have to work so hard on it now. I am asked to provide thirty volumes. I would provide three hundred if I raked up all the ephemeral trash I have had to write in my lifetime. Only a thousand sets will be printed, and they are bespoken long ago. Half the type is already melted down to make room for the other half. Later on all the volumes that are worth it will be reprinted and sold at reasonable prices. An American complete edition will be on sale on the hire-purchase system."

The collected edition of Shaw's writings would advance much more rapidly if it weren't for the people

who write to ask favors of him, who need money and imagine that the "millionaire socialist," as he sometimes, to this disgust, is called, will delightedly supply them.

"If I had a large office and about thirty clerks," he said, "I might possibly be able to deal with my correspondence. And if I had an income of about one hundred and fifty million dollars I might perhaps be able to advance all the money that is demanded.

"A great many people, having written once, write a second time to tell me that I might have had the common courtesy to reply to their nice letter. They don't seem to realize that writing is my profession, and that if I wrote to them all my own work would be impossible. As it is, I could have written about twenty additional plays in the time I have spent in writing to correspondents. If these people had existed in Shakespeare's time, his literary output would have been very much reduced.

"People don't think what it costs me to write letters. I am asked questions that would require an elaborate reply, which would be worth fifteen hundred dollars for the first serial rights. But they expect to get replies for nothing, forgetting that I have to live."

The talk turned to dramatic criticism, and Shaw was reminded that some critics had complained of what they termed the "inordinate length" of *Saint Joan*, *The Apple Cart*, and some of his other plays.

"To read between the lines of dramatic criticism," he replied, "you must understand dramatic critics. I understand them, of course, having been one myself. The



critic's attitude toward a play is exactly the opposite of the playgoer's. To him, going to the theater is a bread-winning job, a job for which he has to be paid. Therefore his natural desire is to have it made as short and easy for him as possible. He is sick to death of compulsory theatergoing; he hates being made to think hard; and he particularly resents a long play because it means that he may be late in handing in his notice.

"The playgoer, on the other hand, goes to the theater to enjoy himself; and actually pays — pays! think of that! — to get in. He loves the theater and flies to it to escape from his dull and sometimes squalid home. If he thinks about the author at all he feels gratitude and affectionate admiration. The critic has nothing but loathing for his ruthless taskmaster.

"There are about two practicable lengths for a play," Shaw went on. "A fashionable piece, written for people who find it a strain to dine before eight, should contain eighteen thousand words and last two hours at most. The first act consists of general indications of what is going to happen, and staves it off until the end of the second. The second consists of the big situation, which is all the writer actually has to give. Through the third act he keeps the curtain up as best he can until it is time to let the cheap people out to catch their trains to the suburbs.

"The other practicable play length is the classical three hours and a half. But only a playwright of genius can keep an audience interested enough to forget its stuffy discomforts for so long. I have found it the necessary length for the play of ideas; it is the length of the

masterpieces of Shakespeare when they are played as he intended them to be played, instead of mutilated for the sake of the scene painter and the bars. Playgoers will listen all that time and longer if they are given the proper stuff.

Eugene O'Neill has proved this in America as conclusively as I have proved it in England. New York managements now request me to extend my next play to at least eight acts."

"What will be the subject of your next play?" was the final question.

"You will know when it is completed," Shaw replied. "So will I. It is not yet begun, nor likely to be until the Collected Edition is off my hands."

*Sunday Express*

LONDON

March 1, 1931

The newspaper's headlines declared that in this interview G.B.S. would be found talking about love, sex, Charlie Chaplin, and

"WHY OLD MEN DON'T MATTER!"





GEORGE Bernard Shaw told me the other day how he would like to die.

"I should prefer," he said, "to die in a reasonably dry ditch under the stars."

Mr. Shaw said this in one of the most notable interviews he has given.

It was notable, among other things, because of the fact that, in the course of it, he defined for the first time his attitude toward love and sex—which for long has been a subject for debate on the part of his admirers and critics—and, in doing so, denied the imputation that he is, as he put it, "a sexless creature."

Ranging over a wide variety of topics—from his own works to playing the bagpipes—he told how he was a movie cowboy in a film by Barrie that the public never saw, and, in discussing the talkies, gave his opinion on the much-argued question, "Should Charlie Chaplin Talk?" answering in the affirmative.

One of his sallies was in the best Shavian vein. Speaking of the days when he, Oscar Wilde, George Moore, and other celebrities of the future were young together, he remarked, "We were amazed when we all turned out to be Great Men." And he added:—

"Always be polite to young nobodies—you never know how they will turn out. If you must kick somebody, kick the old."

Mr. Shaw told how he would like to die in reply to a question put originally by Edison. The question was this:

“When you look back on your life from your deathbed, by what facts will you determine whether you succeeded or failed?”

Shaw’s reply was:

“I am not on my deathbed, except in so far as we are all on our deathbeds. Personally I should prefer to die in a reasonably dry ditch under the stars.

“I have not succeeded; people have agreed to rank me as successful — that is all. Have I not written somewhere that life levels all men: death reveals the eminent. Well, I am not quite dead yet, only seven-eighths dead.”

I at once put another Edison question. It was:

“If you could prescribe and enforce a system of education for the world’s whole population, on what essentials would you place the greatest emphasis?”

Mr. Shaw wrote his reply to this as follows:

“Reading (including music), writing, arithmetic, and manners, primarily and compulsorily; elementary law, economics, and physics (including astro-physics) as qualifications for employments other than the performance of manual operations under tutelage; and, for the rest, what the learner is capable of.”

Mr. Shaw defined his attitude toward Love and Sex in reply to comments on himself made in a recently published interview with G. K. Chesterton by George Sylvester Viereck.

In the course of this interview Mr. Chesterton was quoted as saying: —

"Shaw looks upon love as apish, grotesque, and base in itself. He knows that the body must respond to the cravings of its appetites, including sex, but he wants to sneer at it with his head."

And Viereck quoted himself as saying to Chesterton:—

"Shaw asked me to take the love element out of my recital of the life and loves of the Wandering Jew. He said that love was always uninteresting."

Mr. Shaw replied (with his pen) as follows:

"Rubbish. Viereck is 80 per cent. a clever and strong-minded man and 20 per cent. an impenetrable block-head. He generally brings the 20 per cent. to bear on me; and as to Chesterton, he doesn't even understand G.K.C.'s language.

"I never told Viereck that love was uninteresting. I told him that mere paper satisfactions are useless to real sexual passion. The amours of the Wandering Jew would be dull enough as authentic police reports; as fiction they are intolerable.

"Music and painting can do something to gratify and a good deal to refine and sublimate sex. Raphael's Cupid and Psyche series and Wagner's Tristan and Isolde are better than the real thing often is; but this mechanical stuff that literary men shove into their stories because publishers think no book complete without it is mere drivel to anyone who has had genuine sexual experience.

"But when I tell them this obvious fact they pretend that I am a sexless creature incapable of understanding their red-blooded He-manity. Yah!"

"Is there any particular phase of the talkies that is interesting you at present?" I asked. "What do you consider is the best film yet made?"

"The best films I have seen are Russian ones," replied Mr. Shaw.

"We are doing our best to prevent them from being shown because they are too moral for us.

"I am not interested in any particular phase of the talkies. I am interested in the enormous fact that a method of projecting drama and acting has been discovered which reduces our cheap shabby, half-visible half-audible old stage method to absurdity.

"And our theatre people are still blinking at it, and saying it will not last because the public like the real thing. As if Charlie Chaplin were not ten times more real to us than any stage actor in the world!

"If this is true of Charlie Silent, what will Charlie Talking be? It is pitiable to hear our old theatre managers prophesying nonsense on their way to oblivion through the bankruptcy court."

My interview took place at Malvern during a weekend that Mr. Shaw spent in the town where the annual festival of his plays, now almost as definite a fixture as the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-on-Avon, is held. Up to this point he talked in his rooms at his hotel. But then, declaring that he needed exercise, he took me for what he called a "walk" up the Worcestershire Beacon, the loftiest of the neighbouring near-mountains that are known misleadingly as the Malvern Hills.

Most people who have reached fifty—and some who haven't—prefer to ascend the Beacon on the backs of



reluctant donkeys, held in readiness at its base. But Mr. Shaw, who is seventy-four, has no use for the donkeys, preferring to go up on his own sinewy legs.

Several times, to the wondering admiration of Malvernites, he has legged it right up to the summit of the Beacon, 1,440 feet above sea level.

On the occasion of which I write, mercifully, he was unable to spare the time to repeat this performance, but contented himself with a lesser, but to me sufficiently strenuous, climb around the north side of the great "hill"; scrambling up rocky declivities and striding around tricky bends in the winding and often non-existent pathway—with fearsome depths yawning beneath—as imperturbably as if he were still in the Malvern streets. And as he walked he talked—fascinatingly as ever.

Mention of Carnera brought up the subject of prize-fighting generally, in which the author of "Cashel Byron's Profession" maintains, of course, a lively and expert interest.

"Why do you consider it is," I asked, "that England does not seem able to produce a heavy-weight champion?"

"There are dozens of men in every parish in England," said Mr. Shaw, "who could walk over all the champions in the ring as easily as Tunney walked over the apparently unconquerable Carpentier and his conqueror, Dempsey, if they gave their minds to it as he did. They prefer other careers, that is all."

Returning to the subject of the films, I asked Mr. Shaw if seeing himself as others see him in the two

talkies of himself he had made had resulted in his making any new discoveries about himself.

"Only that I am getting very old," he replied whimsically, "and that my mouth is getting very crooked. But I made a discovery about myself when first I saw myself on the screen in a picture I helped to make a long time ago.

"I had often noticed that my father bore a strong resemblance to Sir Horace Plunkett (the apostle of agricultural organisation and the inventor of the formula 'Dominion Home Rule,' which solved the Irish question).

"When I saw the first movie in which I took part I realised for the first time that I also resembled Plunkett.

"That film was an extraordinary affair that Barrie put together in pre-war days. Any number of celebrities of one kind or another took part in it; some of them unconsciously.

"It began, I remember, with a dinner party at the Savoy Hotel, one of the diners being the then Mr. Asquith and another myself.

"Afterwards G. K. Chesterton, William Archer, Lord Howard de Walden, Barrie, and myself were taken to Elstree and dressed up as cowboys.

"As such we did all sorts of insane things, chasing horses and riding motor-cycles, and creeping in and out of drain pipes. At one time I had to ride over a precipice with five people behind me on a motor-cycle. True, the precipices were only a few feet high, but at my age I don't greatly enjoy falling even a few feet.

"The public, however, was denied the pleasure of witnessing these antics of mine, as Barrie eventually decided to scrap the film. He afterwards utilised part of it in a piece he wrote for Gaby Deslys."

The conversation turned to Mr. Shaw's plays. I mentioned that he had been quoted as saying, when asked if he had any personal favourite among them, that he "rather liked 'Heartbreak House.'" This play, of course, gives the Shavian view of, to quote the preface, "leisured, cultured Europe" before and during the war.

"I may have said something like that," G.B.S. admitted, and then added, "but plays like 'Heartbreak House' are expensive."

I looked at him inquiringly, imaging he meant they call for expensive casts.

"It took half a century of international dry rot and a war on top of it to bring that one to birth," he explained.

"There are always any amount of subjects crying for treatment on the stage if only playwrights could see the possibilities in them. Housing conditions in the London slums, for instance, had been a national scandal for a century before I dramatised them in 'Widowers' Houses.'"

We talked of Shakespeare's "Macbeth," apropos of Sybil Thorndike's production of that play, which Mr. Shaw largely directed, and he remarked that he has always wished to see a performance of it given entirely in the Scots dialect.

"I believe it would be tremendously impressive," he declared.

Pausing in the path, he proceeded to give one of Macbeth's shorter speeches in "braw Scotch." An uncommonly fine elocutionist, as everybody knows, he did it magnificently.

Apropos, Mr. Shaw was told that when, during the war, Max Reinhardt was getting ready to produce "Macbeth" in Berlin he was anxious to have the bagpipes played in it, but could hear of no one able to play them.

Finally it was suggested to him that there might be somebody capable of doing so among the British civilian prisoners interned at Ruhleben. Sure enough, there proved to be a Scot at Ruhleben who was an expert on the "pipes," but when the latter learned that he was wanted to play them in a German production of "Macbeth" he refused point-blank.

"But surely," pointed out G.B.S., "he might have played patriotic airs throughout, and scored off them in that way."

Mr. Shaw recalled that when, in some other part of the world, somebody was wanted to play the bagpipes, the only person able to do so proved to be a French naval officer!

Dropping into reminiscence, G.B.S. talked entertainingly of his early days as a journalist, of his first two editors, the late Edmund Yates and the very far from "late" Frank Harris—the latter of whom, is now writing a biography of him—and of his early acquaintance with George Moore.

I expressed the opinion that Mr. Moore has never surpassed his novel, "Esther Waters," but Mr. Shaw as-

serted that Moore actually attained his high-water mark early with "A Mummer's Wife."

He quoted with great relish a saying of Moore's, "Shaw is the funny man in the English boarding house."

"But probably the best epigram ever made about me," he added, "was one of Oscar Wilde's, which, by the way, has often been misquoted.

"'Shaw hasn't an enemy in the world,' said Oscar; 'and none of his friends like him.'"

It was here that Mr. Shaw made the observation about youth and age I quoted in part at the beginning of this interview.

"We had no respect for one another in those days," he declared, "and were amazed when we all turned out to be Great Men. Always be polite to young nobodies: you never know how they will turn out. If you must kick somebody, kick the old."



VI

*Sunday Dispatch*

LONDON

June 4, 1933

“HALT, HITLER!”

is the caption the *Sunday Dispatch* used to herald this question-and-answer colloquy.







WHILE Mr. Bernard Shaw was making his recent journey around the world, entertaining accounts were forthcoming of his encounters with the Press at every port touched by the Empress of Britain.

When he returned, I, among others, asked him what was the first thing the journalists of the many countries he visited questioned him about. He replied with the one word, *Hitler*.

I was fortunate enough to have a later opportunity of taking up with him the subject of Germany's Dictator. The report which follows of the conversation that ensued is authentic to the last comma, having been revised and passed for publication by G.B.S.

*Myself*: Well, Mr. Shaw, have you returned a Nazi? You came back from Italy to stand up for Mussolini. You came back from Russia to stand up for Stalin. Have you come back from everywhere to stand up for Hitler?

*Mr. Shaw*: The Nazi movement is in many respects one which has my warm sympathy; in fact, I might fairly claim that Herr Hitler has repudiated Karl Marx to enlist under the banner of Bernard Shaw. You can therefore imagine my dismay when at the most critical moment Herr Hitler and the Nazis went mad on the Jewish question.

Herr Hitler has received powers with which only the

sanest of statesmen could be trusted; and his first use of them has been to reincarnate Torquemada, who believed that he was saving the world by not only burning live Jews but digging up and burning dead ones.

*Myself*: Why not have it out with him on paper? If anyone can argue Hitler down, you can.

*Mr. Shaw*: It is idle to argue against this sort of insanity. Judophobia is as pathological as hydrophobia. A statesman infected with it may go on from persecuting Jews to persecuting Jesuits, Freemasons, witches, Laplanders, and perhaps finally Prussians, against whom our handful of British Jewbaiters express a peculiar animus.

The Ku-Klux outrages on Negroes and Catholics in America are a well-known variety of delirium tremens; but no Kleagle has yet been made President of the United States.

The Nazis are suffering from an epidemic of a very malignant disease; and the result is that the British police had to protect Dr. Rosenberg when he came to London, expecting, apparently, to be received with open arms by a friendly England, from being treated as mad dogs are treated.

*Myself*: Well, if you won't argue with Hitler, why not psycho-analyse him? Where did he get this anti-Jew complex? What has it to do with Fascism? Mussolini does not persecute Jews. Why should Hitler?

*Mr. Shaw*: Quite true. Judophobia is not a part of Fascism but an incomprehensible excrescence on it.

*Myself:* But where does the persecution of the Jews come in?

*Mr. Shaw:* Dr. Rosenberg replies that the Jew is a profiteer.

*Myself:* There is nothing peculiar to the Jews in that, is there?

*Mr. Shaw:* Nothing whatever, except that the Jew often understands the game better and is cleverer at playing it than the sort of flaxen-haired chump who feels flattered when he is described as a Nordic.

There is nothing in Dr. Rosenberg's excuse. It is true that as the Nazis are professed Socialists they are pledged to put an end to profiteering. But if there is any lesson that the Socialists have had to learn of late, both from my urgent precepts and from the bitter experience of the Soviets with the Kulaks, it is that a Socialist Government must not expropriate the private employer until it is ready to take his place and do his work.

A silly *gaffe* like the expulsion of Einstein, recalling the French Revolution's "the Republic has no need of chemists" when Lavoisier was guillotined, does not matter. Einstein is as great a man out of Germany as in it; and though the colossal laugh which sounded throughout the civilised world at his expulsion was altogether at the expense of the Nazis, still they can pick Einstein's brains as easily when he is beyond the frontier as they can pocket the material property he has had to leave behind him.

But when they ruin their ordinary private employers

and put them out of productive action without immediately taking over and carrying on their businesses, they reduce production and presently find the country faced with famine.

*Myself*: As Lenin did in Russia before he saw his mistake and had to undo it.

*Mr. Shaw*: Precisely. Even on the ridiculous assumption that the Jews are the only profiteers in Germany, their persecution and expropriation can only transfer their profiteering businesses to the German profiteers, who are just as greedy for profit.

Now if the Nazis are prepared to injure Germany in this useless and cruel way for the sake of destroying the Jew *qua* Jew, it is evident that they are not acting as Fascists or as Socialists, but simply running amuck in the indulgence of a pure phobia: that is, acting like madmen. By doing so they are throwing away all the sympathy they were entitled to from European public opinion.

*Myself*: Had they any?

*Mr. Shaw*: Most certainly they had. As Fascists they had the sympathy of Italy. As Socialists, using Bolshevik dictatorial tactics, they had the sympathy of Russia, in spite of the rivalry of Fascism and Communism.

And elsewhere they had the sympathy of the vast mass of public opinion which has turned angrily away from the delays, the evasions, the windy impotence and anarchist negations of our pseudo-democratic parliamentary system. All this sympathy has been turned

into angry ill-will in a single day by an explosion of senseless Judophobia.

*Myself:* Can you explain it?

*Mr. Shaw:* Well, Herr Hitler's friends tell me that he was forced to sanction the raid on the Jews just as military leaders in the eighteenth century were forced to allow their soldiers to sack conquered cities; but we cannot be persuaded that the great Nazi movement which has carried him to his four years' dictatorship is not something nobler than the blackguardism of the troops of Tilly and Suvorov. Such a defence reduces Fascism to mere racketeering.

Herr Hitler and Captain Goering should put all their followers into quarantine until they can be certified as cured of Judophobia.

May I add that I am not a Jew? I belong to that still naively anti-Jewish nation, the Irish. The Irish do not know that Jesus Christ was a Jew. Probably ninety-nine per cent. of the Nazis are equally ignorant.



VII

*Sunday Graphic*

LONDON

December 17, 1933

The headlines for this text indicated to the newspaper's readers that in it

“BERNARD SHAW TELLS US ALL ABOUT:—

MY PLAYS

MY WORK

MY NOVELS

MY MONEY.”







*"By comparison with Shakespeare, I am a tidy old maid."*

*"All scripts interest me; I cannot contemplate even an expansive shirt front without longing to write something on it."*

*"I have never looked to see which of my plays has made the most money. It is trouble enough to make money, without having to count it afterwards."*

THOSE are just a few of the succession of typical "Shawisms" made by Mr. George Bernard Shaw in the course of an exclusive interview—possibly the most notable he has given.

In it, the world's greatest living dramatist, whose early play, "The Devil's Disciple," is soon to be filmed at Hollywood, and whose latest and much-discussed piece, "On the Rocks," is the current attraction at the London Winter Garden, described for the first time how he *writes* his plays.

And not only that, but told *when* he writes them and how long the writing takes, how he finds his characters—quite often in real life, it appears—and how he revises and re-revises his scripts.

"The publication or performance of a play of mine in the state in which Shakespeare's plays appear in the First Folio would drive me crazy," G. B. S. declared.

And he revealed, among other highly interesting things, that he wrote what is perhaps the greatest of all his plays, "Saint Joan," at his wife's suggestion when he was, as he confessed, at a loss for a subject.

Up to now, in spite of "written interviews," Shaw's methods of work have remained his jealously-guarded secret. And it pleased him to fence airily with my first attempts—initiated *a propos* of the production of the new play which is his twenty-sixth full-length one—to elicit the facts.

"How *do* you write your plays?" I asked.

"Just as they come!"

"When you are engaged on a play, have you any regular hours of work?"

"Yes, between breakfast and lunch. Never later."

We were talking in the room of Shaw's flat in Whitehall Court, on the Thames Embankment, that serves as his "office."

A big, lofty room, whose windows command a fine view of the Thames and its bridges, it is a curious combination of office and study—the shelves groaning with an extraordinary catholic collection of books, including many editions of Shaw's writings; the pictures on the walls, one of them a portrait in oils of Shaw's great-great-grandfather, Robert Shaw, of Sandpits; and the few ornaments, a miniature giraffe among them, noticeable here and there contrasting oddly with the half a dozen business-like filing cabinets, the desk and typewriter of G. B. S.'s woman secretary, and his own big flat-topped and immaculately tidy desk.

So far Mr. Shaw, seated with his arms folded over the

Norfolk jacket he was wearing, and regarding me beatifically, had remained politely evasive.

But later, standing on the hearthrug, as straight as a rifle-barrel for all his 77 years and his now snow-white hair and beard, the Grand Old Man of the drama stopped being reticent.

"Is any of your plays your personal favourite?" he was asked.

"No, of course not," Shaw replied. "My plays are not racehorses. I have no time to bother about them after they are finished and launched."

"How do themes for plays suggest themselves to you? What, particularly, inspired some of the most famous of them? Have you sometimes had a theme in mind for a long time before utilising it?"

"Plays begin in all sorts of ways. I can sit down without an idea in my head except that I must write a play; and a play comes. A good play, too, provided I do not write anything that bores me, like filling out a plot or anything artificial of that kind.

"Most genuine plays begin with a dramatic situation; the play is only a device for bringing it about. 'The Devil's Disciple' obviously grew round a situation. So did 'John Bull's Other Island.' 'Pygmalion,' too, but James Barrie at once divined that when it came to the point I had to leave out the situation; it takes place off stage.

"Sometimes one conceives or observes or hears of a character who insists on being dramatised. Lena Ashwell created 'Heartbreak House' by an anecdote of a delightful character, whom I felt I had to put on the stage: hence the immortal Captain Shotover.

"Then you have the thesis play. 'Back to Methuselah' dramatises the thesis that our conduct is influenced not by our experience but by our expectations, and that life is not at present long enough for us to take it seriously.

"A theme may lie in a playwright's head for half an hour or half a lifetime before he uses it. The perception that St. Joan was an early Protestant came to me from reading the report of her trial; but I never thought of writing a play about her until years later, when my wife suggested it one day when I was at a loss."

"Are all your characters, except the historical ones, purely figments of your imagination, or have some of them been taken from life?"

"Lots of them are from life. Some of them are quite close portraits: in drawing others I have used real people as models. Once or twice I have made a close portrait quite unconsciously and only recognised it when I saw it on the stage.

"No: don't ask me for names! I must not give away my involuntary sitters."

"Which of your plays has been the greatest money-maker? Will you reveal how much money it has made? Approximately how many performances of it have been given?"

"I have never looked. It is trouble enough to make money without having to count it afterwards. The number of performances is no test. One performance in a big theatre may mean more money and more spectators than three in a small one. Even if you disregard the number of performances, and test by the number of

spectators or the gross receipts, you will be thrown out by the difference in the acting.

"Take the list of famous actors from Richard Mansfield to Cedric Hardwicke, and of actresses from Ellen Terry to Edith Evans, who have brought my heroes and heroines to life; and compare the box-office results and see at once how absurd it is to attempt to separate the money the play has made from the money the actors have drawn."

"About how long does it take you to write a play?"

"It depends on the length, and on the complication of the stage business. Also on the quality of the writing. The fashionable length of a play for stalls at the highest West End prices is 18,000 words. My plays, written for an ideal audience of shilling stalls and a two-penny gallery, are from a third to half as long again.

"A slosher using ready-made phrases and never stopping to think can write several thousand words a day with the assistance of more or less alcohol. An average thousand words a day is enough for me if I have to think them all out. But that is between breakfast and lunch.

"There are men—like Balzac, or Handel composing 'Messiah'—who charge at a work and keep on at it night and day until it is finished, keeping themselves awake with coffee. In that way an impetuous playwright could finish a play within a fortnight. There have been playwrights who have written plays for five shillings an act, and finished the fifth act while the fourth was being performed.

"I can write the dialogue of a long play easily within

two months if I stick at it; but it may take me as long again, or longer, to settle the stage business, which is pure drudgery. I had rather write all the dialogue of 'Hamlet' than decide which side of the stage the Ghost enters, or arrange the necessary time for Ophelia to change her dress."

"Are your plays, as originally written, subject to a good deal of revision, or not?"

"Of course they are. I have an artistic conscience which makes it impossible for me to let a job go until it is as good as I can make it at the moment. Besides, I now overwrite to such an extent that I have to cut the play down by a full third to pull it properly together and bring it within possible limits of time.

"The publication or performance of a play of mine in the state in which Shakespeare's plays appear in the First Folio would drive me crazy. But I fully admit that Shakespeare's calculation that it was better to spend his time writing 'Macbeth' than revising 'Hamlet' was justified. But then Shakespeare was a volcano from whom plays burst like lava. I am by comparison a tidy old maid."

"Are all your plays written in shorthand? How did you come to learn shorthand, and when?"

"They have been ever since I could afford a secretary. I use Pitman because it is the one most generally known to secretaries, and can be written very legibly and fully—not as reporters have to scrawl it. I have learnt other systems and forgotten them.

"All scripts interest me. I cannot contemplate even an expansive shirt front without longing to write something on it. Some men will scribble obscenities on

whitewashed walls rather than not write at all. It is part of the born writer's specialisation."

"Had you ever tried your hand at writing a play before, in 1885, you wrote two acts of 'Widowers' Houses' in collaboration with William Archer? Or was the latter actually your first dramatic 'effort'?"

"'Widowers' Houses' was my first completed play. But look at those five novels, written between my twenty-third and twenty-eighth year, with which I began. The proportion of dialogue to description and narrative in them is almost the same as the proportion of dialogue to stage directions in a play.

"By the way, Archer was quite guiltless of collaboration in any part of 'Widowers' Houses.' He repudiated every line of it as a monstrous outrage on his plot. He would turn in his grave if you attributed to him the smallest of my crimes against his Rhine Gold."

"How lengthy a preface will your new play have when published? Why do you consider that your plays need prefaces?"

"My new book will contain two prefaces and three plays. If you buy it you will get good value for your money. When you are tired of reading plays to amuse you, you can read the prefaces to improve your mind.

"My plays do not need prefaces; but the people who buy my books need variety and quantity enough to last them at least a week in these hard times.

"Those who like political essays and don't like plays can skip the plays. Those who like plays and don't like political essays can skip the prefaces. In this way everybody in the family is suited.



"The combination of preface-pamphlet and play is a classic tradition in English literature, but nobody has ever given such good measure as I.

"The only trouble is that silly people who are ignorant of the tradition, and who read neither my books nor anyone else's, imagine that the prefaces explain the plays and that the plays are incomplete without them. Of course, they are entirely independent works. An omnibus volume of my plays has been published; and an omnibus volume of my prefaces is actually in the press."

"Why do you consider it was," was the final question, "that your great gift of characterisation, your wit and other qualities did not make your early novels as successful as your later plays have been? Are the two mediums so different, or are they simply not equally congenial to you?"

"How do you know that my novels are less successful?" G. B. S. demanded. "My plays remain unacted for years at a stretch; but people go on buying my novels and perhaps even reading them.

"As to why I do not go on writing them, do you suppose that anyone who could write a play would condescend to such an easy job as writing a novel? Anybody can write novels; and the worst of it is that nearly everybody does.

"Perhaps when I am ninety I shall become lazy and go back to the old Victorian game. It will be an amusement for my second childhood."



VIII

*Leader*

LONDON

October 13, 1945

The part of the interview here reproduced treats of G.B.S. talking about what the magazine characterized as being

“THE PROSPECT OF LIVING 300 YEARS.”





“DEATH is not to be regarded as natural and inevitable. We die because we do not know how to live, and kill ourselves by lethal habits. Mortality should be confined to murder, suicide and fatal accidents.”

Bernard Shaw was talking to me at his home in Ayot St. Lawrence, Herts. Now in his ninetieth year, he believes human life can and should be extended to at least 300 years, the “necessary span of a worthwhile human life,” essential for “political maturity.” Life, at present, he says, is too short to be taken seriously.

“Remember,” says G. B. S., “that our conduct is influenced not by our experience, but by our expectations. Give a man only 70 years to live, and he sings ‘Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.’ Give him 300 and he becomes a new man. All his valuations change — and valuations govern conduct.

“In my cycle of five plays *Back to Methuselah*, I demand a lifetime of 300 years for political maturity, and condemn all existing attempts at government as mischievous child’s play. I have lately described myself as being, at 89, barely old enough to be the office boy of an under-secretary of state. I am still boyishly interested in boxing, photography, books and pictures of imaginary life, and pseudo-scientific fairy-tales.”

“How did you arrive at the figure of 300?” I asked.

His answer:

"I have lived 89 years and am not yet fully adult politically. Give me a second century of apprenticeship as a ruler, and at the end of it I might be qualified as a senator, and an oracle for a third century. But I do not admit any limit to human life except the statistically certain fatal accident, which must occur to everyone sooner or later.

"Weismann was the first to suggest that death is not natural and is the product of circumstances and environment. But he did not follow it up: it was only a passing hint. I *did* take it up in the *Methuselah* cycle. I started as a biologist in 1906 by a lecture on Darwin, which was the basis of my preface to *Methuselah* nearly 20 years later.

"Science was then neo-Darwinian, and still obsessed and blinded by the reaction against Fundamentalism. But it has slowly come round to my way—until in the essays of Joseph Needham (like me, the son of a musical mother) and in Alexis Carrel's *Man The Unknown* and Maurice Ernest's *The Longer Life*, my view has become orthodox and reached even the Rockefeller Foundation.

"When *Methuselah* was new, its reviewers persisted in describing my immortals as surviving by a conscious exertion of the will to live. But in *Methuselah* the advocates of longer life all die; and the survivors find it just happening to them, to their own puzzlement and surprise in spite of their incredulity."

"But didn't you once say that you yourself dreaded becoming a centenarian, and that 'immortals' might get 'unbearably tired of their old selves?'"

G. B. S.: "No, *I* have not got unbearably tired of *MY* old selves. I have simply left them behind. I am still able to acquire a new self every year, like a new suit of clothes. But the body inside the clothes is wearing out; and personal immortality cannot be faced in such circumstances."

"But," I objected, "you, who may be described as 89 years young, admit that the body inside your clothes is wearing out. What is the point of others, weaklings compared with you, living on?"

G. B. S.: "There has never been any question of the horror of a race of Strudbrugs. Swift made an end of that. (The Strudbrugs were the people in *Gulliver's Travels* who were cursed with immortality. Deathless, but with all their faculties gone, having lost even their memory, they were the most miserable of their kind.)

"What is contemplated as a political lifetime, is a century of infancy and adolescence, a second of political maturity, and a third of voteless oracular wisdom. That is enough for learners, administrators and senators.

"Men are now much younger and more vigorous in mind and body at 70 than they were within my recollection at 60. Women are younger at 50 than they were at 30 within the same period. Clearly, Dr. Maurice Ernest's Centenarian Club has some hard actuarial facts to go on."

"Supposing," I said, "you were to prescribe a final philosophy for this age, what would it be?"

"I do not prescribe anything final," Shaw replied. "I am not God Almighty, disguised as G. B. S. I can, if you

put me to it, suggest a humdrum political programme for the next few years.

“For instance, I’m advising the women to demand the Coupled Vote — one couple one vote — so that every authority shall contain as many women as men, whether either of them likes it or not. And I advise the whole nation to put before every other reform the invention of an alphabet of at least 42 letters, capable of indicating every sound in our speech without using more than one letter for each sound. The yearly cost of having to spell my name with four letters instead of two is astronomical. The saving would repay the cost of the atomic bomb in a few months.” [ . . . ]

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